

THE DUTCH IN TASMANIA:
An Exploration of Ethnicity and
Immigrant Adaptation

by
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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of this thesis.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Roberta Julian', written in dark ink.

Roberta Julian

ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that Tasmania's largest non-English speaking ethnic category is that of Dutch immigrants and their descendants, it has been the subject of very little empirical research. This study remedies this omission by providing an ethnographic account of the adaptation of Dutch immigrants and their descendants in southern Tasmania. The concept of 'ethnicity' is also critically examined and its role in the process of immigrant adaptation is analyzed.

The emphasis throughout is upon the structural context within which immigrant adaptation takes place by focussing on the relationship between social networks, ethnic organizational development and the process of self-identification. Migrant adaptation is a process in which an immigrant selects strategies. Such strategies are constrained both by the skill level of immigrants and their access to resources and opportunities in the receiving society. The mobilization of ethnicity is thus seen as a situationally specific adaptive strategy which the immigrant chooses from a repertoire of available identity options.

Two alternative patterns of adaptation are identified. The first is characterized by the development of an 'ethnic' community with a wide range of organizational development and relatively closed social networks leading to the maintenance of ethnic traits. The second pattern involves the dispersion of migrant individuals within the receiving society, resulting in limited ethnic networks and hence a decline in the salience of ethnicity both in social relationships and as an identity construct.

The two types of adaptation are the result of an individual's social location in both the society of origin and the receiving society. Factors considered include the level of modernity characterizing these societies, an individual's social location in the society of origin prior to emigration and upon arrival in the receiving society, mode of migration, skill level, availability of resources and identity options and the structure of opportunities in the receiving society. Using this approach the recent 'ethnic revival' in modern societies can be distinguished as a different phenomenon from the mobilization of ethnicity among first-generation migrants.

Variations in the nature of ethnic mobilization are explained through an examination, grounded in actual social experiences, of the structural conditions which lead to the choice of strategies. The study thus demonstrates the limited explanatory power of ethnicity *per se* in the process of immigrant adaptation. The concept of 'ethnicity' is a descriptive term which subsumes a variety of factors and processes. In order to develop adequate explanations of ethnic phenomena in modern society it is therefore necessary to develop concepts based on distinct and measurable processes.

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